OPEN AND SHUT?

Tweets by @RickyPo

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Thursday, December 17, 2015

The open access movement slips into closed mode

In October 2003, at a conference held by the Max Planck Society (MPG) and the European Cultural Heritage Online (ECHO) project, a document was drafted that came to be known as the Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities.

More than 120 cultural and political organisations from around the world attended and the names of the signatories are openly available here.

Today the Berlin Declaration is held to be one of the keystone events of the open access movement — offering as it did a definition of open access, and calling as it did on all researchers to publish their work in accordance with the open principles outlined in the Declaration.

"In order to realize the vision of a global and accessible representation of knowledge," the Declaration added, "the future Web has to be sustainable, interactive, and transparent."

The word transparent is surely important here, and indeed the open access movement (not unsurprisingly) prides itself on openness and transparency. But as with anything that is precious, there is always the danger that openness and transparency can give way to secrecy and opaqueness.

By invitation only

There have been annual follow-up conferences to monitor implementation of the Berlin Declaration since 2003, and these have been held in various parts of the world — in March 2005, for instance, I attended Berlin 3, which that year took place in Southampton (and for which I wrote a report). The majority of these conferences, however, have been held in Germany, with the last two seeing a return to Berlin. This year's event (Berlin 12) was held on December 8th and 9th at the Seminaris CampusHotel Berlin.

Of course, open access conferences and gatherings are two a penny today. But given its historical importance, the annual Berlin conference is viewed as a significant event in the OA calendar. It was particularly striking, therefore, that this year (unlike most OA conferences, and so far as I am aware all previous Berlin conferences) Berlin 12 was "by invitation only".

Also unlike other open access conferences, there was no live streaming of Berlin 12, and no press passes were available. And although a Twitter hashtag was available for the conference, this generated very little in the way of tweets, with most in any case coming from people who were not actually present at the conference, including a tweet from a Max Planck librarian complaining that no MPG librarians had been invited to the conference.

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The OA Interviews: Taylor & Francis' Deborah Kahn discusses Dove Medical Press

Please note the postscript to this interview here The open-access publisher Dove Medical Press has a controversial past and I have writ...

Open Access: "Information wants to be free"?

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Why it was decided to make Berlin 12 a closed event is not clear. We do however know who gave presentations as the agenda is online, and this indicates that there were 14 presentations, 6 of which were given by German presenters (and 4 of these by Max Planck people). This is a surprising ratio given that the subsequent press release described Berlin 12 as an international conference. There also appears to have been a shortage of women presenters (see here, here, and here).

But who were the 90 delegates who attended the conference? That we do not know. When I emailed the organisers to ask for a copy of the delegate list my question initially fell on deaf ears. After a number of failed attempts, I contacted the Conference Chair Ulrich Pöschl.

Pöschl replied, "In analogy to most if not all of the many scholarly conferences and workshops I have attended, we are not planning a public release of the participants' list. As usual, the participants of the meeting received a list of the pre-registered participants' names and affiliations, and there is nothing secret about it. However, I see no basis for releasing the conference participants' list to non-participants, as we have not asked the participants if they would agree to distributing or publicly listing their names (which is not trivial under German data protection laws; e.g., on the web pages of my institute, I can list my co-workers only if they explicitly agree to it)."

This contrasts, it has to be said, with Berlin 10 (held in South Africa), where the delegate list was made freely available online, and is still there. Moreover, the Berlin 10 delegate list can be sorted by country, by institution and by name. There is also a wealth of information about the conference on the home page here.

We could add that publishing the delegate list for open access conferences appears to be pretty standard practice — see here and here for instance.

However, is Pöschl right to say that there is a specific German problem when it comes to publishing delegate lists? I don't know, but I note that the delegate list for the annual conference for the Marine Ingredients Organisation (IFFO) (which was held in Berlin in September) can be downloaded here.

Outcome

Transparency aside, what was the outcome of the Berlin 12 meeting? When I asked Pöschl he explained, "As specified in the official news release from the conference, the advice and statements of the participants will be incorporated in the formulation of an 'Expression of Interest' that outlines the goal of transforming subscription journals to open access publishing and shall be released in early 2016".

This points to the fact that the central theme of the conference was the transformation of subscription journals to Open Access, as outlined in a recent white paper by the Max Planck Digital Library. Essentially, the proposal is to "flip" all scholarly journals from a subscription model to an open access one — an approach that some have described as "magical thinking" and/or impractical (see, for instance, here, here and here).

The Expression of Interest will presumably be accompanied by a roadmap outlining how the proposal can be realised. Who will draft this roadmap and who will decide what it contains is not entirely clear. The conference press release says, "The key to this lies in the hands of the scientific institutions and their sponsors", and as Pöschl told me, the advice and comments of delegates to Berlin 12 will be taken into account in producing the Expression of Interest. If that is right, should we not know exactly who the 90 delegates attending the conference were?

All in all, we must wonder why there was a need for all the secrecy that appears to have surrounded Berlin 12. And given this secrecy, perhaps we should be concerned that there is a danger the open access movement could become some kind of secret society in which a small self-selected group of unknown people make decisions and proposals intended to impact the entire global scholarly communication system?

Either way, what happened to the openness and transparency inherent in the Berlin Declaration?

In the spirit of that transparency I invite all those who attended the Berlin 12 to attach their name below (using the comment functionality), and if they feel so inspired to share their thoughts on whether they feel that open access conferences ought to be held *in camera* in the way Berlin 12 appears to have been.

Or is it wrong and/or naïve to think that open access implies openness and transparency in the decision making and processes involved in making open access a reality, as well as of research outputs?

(A print version of this eBook is available here) Earlier this year I was invited to discuss with Georgia Institute of Technology libraria...

The Life and Death of an Open Access Journal: Q&A with Librarian Marcus Banks

Librarians have been at the forefront of the open access movement since the beginning, not least because in 1998 the Association of Researc...

The Open Access Interviews: OMICS Publishing Group's Srinu Babu Gedela

***Update: On August 26th 2016, the US government (Federal Trade Commission) announced that it has charged OMICS with making false claims, ...

New Assignment

Slashdot is this week interviewing NYU professor Jay Rosen , a long-time proponent of civic journalism . Rosen recently started NewAssignm...

The Open Access Big Deal: Back to the Future

On a superficial reading open access is intended to do no more than what it says on the can: provide an internet-based scholarly communicat...

Copyright: the immoveable barrier that open access advocates underestimated

In calling for research papers to be made freely available open access advocates promised that doing so would lead to a simpler, less cos...

Community Action Publishing: Broadening the Pool

We are today seeing growing dissatisfaction with the pay-to-publish model for open access. As this requires authors (or their funders or ins...

PLOS CEO Alison Mudditt discusses new OA agreement with the University of California

The Public Library of Science (PLOS) and the University of California (UC) have today announced a two-year agreement designed to make...

Posted by Richard Poynder at 14:51

43 comments:

Leonid Schneider said...

First of all, the is no valid reason not to disclose the list of participants. German privacy laws? Every participant should have been asked at registration step to acknowledge with one click to being publicly listed as such. There, done.
About the general direction where OA movement is going, if Berlin 12 is to be taken seriously: it goes the way of most revolutions, into new dictatorships. Let me fantasize a bit.
In some years, all research will be OA. Even Elsevier will switch to OA. Thanks to secret back-room deals like recently in Netherlands, there will be no financial loss to the publishers and no gain for taxpayers. But the editorial processes and peer review will remain largely intransparent, elite (OA-) journals still rule and careers still decided on impact factor or its corrupt successor. The scientists holding the power will be the ones who adapted best to the new OA system and the pretence of transparency.
Prior to this, as in all good revolutions, the people behind the new OA will achieve stellar careers and huge power. Their former OA comrades-in-arms, who kept on insisting on a "truer" revolution, namely the opening of science beyond OA, will be sidelined, pushed out of academia or into insignificance.
But the good news will be: all these dodgy irreproducible papers which are now largely behind the paywall, will be published in OA in future. What bliss.

December 17, 2015 4:48 pm

Richard Poynder said...

Eloy Rodrigues describes it as a "new Berlin Wall": https://goo.gl/0yFyjq

December 17, 2015 5:54 pm

Mike Taylor said...

Richard, you are quite right to draw attention to this inexplicable veil of secrecy surrounding Berlin 12, something which is completely inimical to the spirit of openness. This is disturbing, and I hope will be remedied for the next Berlin meeting.

However, you are quite wrong to generalise: "perhaps we should be concerned that there is a danger the open access movement could become some kind of secret society in which a small self-selected group of unknown people make decisions". This is inexplicable and completely out-of-character scaremongering, and I'm at a loss to understand what you can have intended by it. It's more the kind of rhetorical manoeuvre I would have expected from someone like Kent Anderson, and by proposing it you play right into the hands of him and his fellow reactionaries.

If on reflection you agree, I would welcome a retraction of that part of your post. (To be clear, though: your blog, your choice.)

December 17, 2015 6:49 pm

Stevan Harnad said...

Berlin Stonewalling -- or Flip-Flop

1. Richard Poynder's take on Berlin 12 is basically valid (even though perhaps a touch too conspiratorially minded).

2. The much-too-long series of Berlin X meetings, huffing on year after year, have long been much-ado-about-next-to-nothing.

3. The solemn "Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities," with its unending list of signatories, was never anything more than a parroting of the 2003 "Bethesda Statement on Open Access *Publishing* [sic]," which was, in turn, a verbose reiteration of half of the 2002 Budapest Open Access Initiative -- skewed to only BOAI-2 ("gold" open access publishing), virtually ignoring BOAI-1

Where is the Open Access Foundation?

While the term Open Access (OA) has its origins in the 2002 Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI), the concept and practice of OA has bee...

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Followers

("green" open access self-archiving).

4. For what it's worth, I attended Berlin 1 in Berlin in 2003 (out of curiosity, and in the hope it would lead to something) and we hosted Berlin 3 in Southampton in 2005 (at which it was officially recommended to *require* BOAI-1, green OA self-archiving, and to *encourage* BOAI-2, gold OA publishing.

5. After that the Berlin series went on and on (I never attended again), but the progress on implementing the Southampton/Berlin-3 recommendations was transpiring elsewhere (with the ROARMAP adopted mandates in the UK, Australia, EU, and US, starting from 2003 to today).

6. As far as I can tell, the Berlin X series just continues fussing about gold OA, and although I am less suspicious than Richard, I too suspect that the "secrecy" was because the institutional reps attending Berlin 12 are trying to forge a common front for working out a gold-OA "flip" deal with publishers.

And my prediction, for reasons I've repeated, unheeded, many, many times, is that any flip will be a flop.

December 19, 2015 2:56 pm

Richard Poynder said...

Hi Mike,

Actually, I think there has always been a strand of the OA movement that has tended towards non-transparency and non-inclusiveness.

However, my interest here is in likely future developments. Whatever the details of the Berlin 12 meeting, we know that the focus was on “the transformation of subscription journals to Open Access, as outlined in a recent white paper by the Max Planck Digital Library”. In other words, the mass “flipping” of subscription-based journals to open access models.

Were this strategy to become the future of open access it would surely lead to a lot of behind-closed-doors meetings with publishers in order to agree the details and the cost of this flipping.

We can get a sense of how this could play out if we consider the way in which VSNU has been agreeing OA deals with publishers like Springer and Elsevier. So far as I am aware the details of the contracts being put in place are not being made public. As the VSNU FAQ on the Elsevier deal puts it, "we do not comment specifically on the financial agreements that are involved in this agreement because it is, of course, sensitive competitive information."

This suggests to me that achieving open access could become an increasingly non-transparent and secret process, and one that would presumably take place outside the purview of the wider OA movement.

For this reason, I feel OA advocates should be doing more to alert the world to the dangers of this approach. After all, OA promised not only to reduce the costs of scholarly communication but to increase pricing transparency too. Can we really expect either of these goals to be achieved if the future of OA becomes dependent on non-transparent deals with legacy publishers?

These kind of deals will also perpetuate the legacy journal and all that goes with it — including obeisance to the Impact Factor and to the power of legacy brands.

December 19, 2015 2:56 pm

Stevan Harnad said...

http://www.talkingelectronics.com/projects/5-Projects/images/THE-FLIP-FLOP.gif

(Richard, maybe you can post this as a displayed image; commentators don't have image html function.)

December 19, 2015 3:08 pm

Richard Poynder said...

Here it is as a clickable link Stevan.

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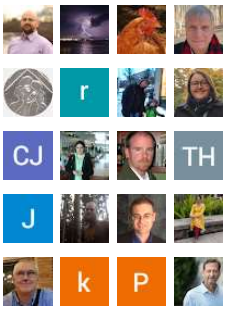

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December 19, 2015 3:22 pm

Billy E. said...

I was one of the delegates at Berlin 12, and I agree with Richard's concerns that the invitation-only nature of the conference was in (too) many ways antithetical to the goals/ideals of OA.

December 19, 2015 11:07 pm

Unknown said...

Mike,
I have sympathy with Richard on the issue of the "secret society". Look at http://www.openscholarship.org/jcms/c_5012/en/home "Enabling Open Scholarship" where the great and good set up a secret organisation to manage OA. It includes many of the professors, etc. of OA and shuts out people like me and you. This was 7-8 years ago and suggests that the OA movement was a priveleged clique that dictated what others should do.
The is no sense of "Open" in the way that "Free/Open Source" is Open.

December 21, 2015 11:51 am

Peter Murray-Rust said...

Sorry - the previous comment was from Peter Murray-Rust

December 21, 2015 12:23 pm

Stevan Harnad said...

Plot Spotting

PMR: *""Enabling Open Scholarship" where the great and good set up a secret organisation to manage OA"*

What balderdash! a "secret organization" that is public, that displays all its documents publicly, and that any institution can join!

But conspiratorial thinking knows no limits. It can even declare information to be secret of which the declarant is merely ignorant rather than deprived...

Yet there are certainly valid reasons for impatience and frustration (if not paranoia) on account of the slow and meandering course of OA. And back-room deals are indeed being made or attempted. But look to commercial interests and lobbying there (the usual suspects), not to those whose only interest is in hastening the progress of OA. Those are not the interests that seek or need secrecy.

December 21, 2015 3:16 pm

Mike Taylor said...

Well, Richard, I certainly agree with your underlying point, which (as I understand it) is that we need to vigilant that this kind of invite-only, behind-closed-doors meeting does not become the norm -- does not become acceptable -- in open-access circles. So thank you for quite properly calling it out.

December 21, 2015 3:30 pm

Stevan Harnad said...

Open and Closed

PMR yet again opines: *"EOS… claimed a space, closed it, & did nothing..."*

Here's a sample of some of the "nothing" EOS did:

Swan A, Gargouri Y, Hunt M and Harnad S (2015) PASTEUR4OA: Working together to promote Open Access policy alignment in Europe. *Work package 3 report: Open Access policies* (March 2015)

(Yet we could perhaps agree that there are after all some things — though perhaps not EOS — that might leave us all better off if kept closed… ;>))

December 21, 2015 4:03 pm

Richard Poynder said...

There seems to be no mention of this on the EOS web site Stevan. The latest update is dated January 2013.

December 21, 2015 4:16 pm

Stevan Harnad said...

There must be a pony...

RP: *"no mention of this on the EOS web site"*

Well spotted, Richard. But not exactly evidence of secrecy or hidden agenda, is it?

Because EOS has no budget for maintaining the website, the limited resources are used to conduct and make public (sic) the research findings.

Or is there some other point you are trying to make, Richard? Please do share your suspicions...

December 21, 2015 4:25 pm

Richard Poynder said...

I have no suspicions about EOS Stevan. Peter raised the topic of EOS. I was simply suggesting that the lack of updating on the site was what probably led Peter to conclude that the organisation has not been active since 2013.

December 21, 2015 4:34 pm

Leonid Schneider said...

Dear all, I received a reply from Ulrich Pöschl on behalf of the Max Planck Society. The brief interview is available at the end of my blog: https://forbetterscience.wordpress.com/2015/12/24/berlin12-closed-society-at-an-open-access-conference/

December 23, 2015 11:59 pm

Rick Anderson (editor) said...

Stevan, is it really true that any institution can join the EOS? According to the webpage, membership is "available to *approved* institutions" (emphasis mine). I assume that EOS itself does the approving -- is that correct? And if so, that means that it's not really true that "any institution can join," is it?

Stevan, Is it really true that the EOS is "public"? I don't see any list of its members anywhere on the site. (If I'm missing it, please do provide a link.) I would assume that an organization that is "public" (as distinct from a "secret society," the term at which you took such umbrage) would at the very least make its institutional membership a matter of public record, wouldn't it?

And does the EOS really make all of its documents public? On the site I see a small list of briefing papers -- are those the only documents the organization has produced? No minutes, no agendas, no other documents that would normally characterize the work of an organization committed to transparency and public openness?

To be clear, the EOS is under no more obligation to be public and transparent in its work than any other organization is -- this isn't about legal or ethical obligation. It's just about commitment to principles of openness and transparency.

December 24, 2015 4:49 am

Unknown said...

Presentations from this event are now online: http://www.berlin12.org/presentations/

December 24, 2015 1:19 pm

Unknown said...

Moreover, The Agenda, Presentations, Reports & Pictures can be found at http://www.berlin12.org/conference/

December 24, 2015 3:36 pm

Stevan Harnad said...

"EOS" Exposed!

Rick Anderson: *"Stevan, is it really true that any institution can join the EOS? According to the webpage, membership is "available to approved institutions" (emphasis mine). I assume that EOS itself does the approving -- is that correct? And if so, that means that it's not really true that "any institution can join," is it?"*

Ok. You caught me, Rick! I guess I'll have to 'fess up now: EOS is a secret organization whose true goals I am not at liberty to divulge. The approval of the approved institutions (just a small subset of the many who have applied for approval across the years) is done by an invisible college whose identities are all classified, along with the identities of the institutions and the goal of the organization, but if you make a formal FOI request it might be possible to provide you with an edited transcript of the list (with identities coded for confidentiality).

Rick Anderson: *"Stevan, Is it really true that the EOS is "public"? I don't see any list of its members anywhere on the site. (If I'm missing it, please do provide a link.) I would assume that an organization that is "public" (as distinct from a "secret society," the term at which you took such umbrage) would at the very least make its institutional membership a matter of public record, wouldn't it?"*

You're right again, Rick. EOS is indeed not public: It is a secret society whose true purposes (which have no relation to what it says on the website) I am not at liberty to divulge.

Rick Anderson: *"And does the EOS really make all of its documents public? On the site I see a small list of briefing papers -- are those the only documents the organization has produced? No minutes, no agendas, no other documents that would normally characterize the work of an organization committed to transparency and public openness?"*

I'm truly embarrassed now, Rick. Fact is, you've got me again! The documents on the website have nothing to do with the true objectives and activities of EOS. We do have minutes and agendas, but those are all confidential (especially our true goals) as we are in fact not committed to transparency and public openness -- or, for that matter, to openness of any kind.

Rick Anderson: *"To be clear, the EOS is under no more obligation to be public and transparent in its work than any other organization is -- this isn't about legal or ethical obligation. It's just about commitment to principles of openness and transparency."*

You're quite right Rick, and I'm really grateful to you (and to Richard too) for giving me this opportunity to unburden my conscience, which has been weighed down for years with the play-acting we've been doing. Indeed Yuletide is almost the optimal moment for at last coming clean about this shabby business. (I can think of only one date mid-spring date that might have been even better.)

Congratulations on your successful sleuthing! You have both performed an invaluable service to the academic community and the public at large for unmasking this sordid business. Please do keep up the courageous and insightful work.

"Stevan Harnad"

(Still December 25 in Canada...)

December 26, 2015 3:05 am

Richard Poynder said...

Those interested in the main topic of this blog post may want to take a look at this CNI presentation by MacKenzie Smith and Ivy Anderson.

The presentation provides details of a study being undertaken at the University of California that is trying to establish whether and how gold open access will become sustainable. The presentation begins by warning that the US and Europe appear currently to be on a collision course with regard to open access.

The presentation concludes that while gold OA may be sustainable, it would require that funders pay much of the cost, and that APC prices fall. Yet as the presenters point out, publishers insist that APC prices will

have to go up rather than down.

They also report that one of the main areas of disagreement at Berlin 12 was the gold OA offset arrangements currently being introduced in Europe. The problem: these agreements will not reduce costs.

December 26, 2015 2:10 pm

Stevan Harnad said...

Counting the ways global gold flips are doomed to flop

And worse than not reducing costs, global gold OA "flips" are doomed to flop for a host of reasons familiar from evolution, among them: (1) they are an "evolutionary UNstable strategy," (2) they favor defectors (in a prisoners' dilemma sense), (3) they count on the sustainability of global cooperation (in an oligopolistic sense) among providers and clients, and (4) they prop up a grotesquely inflated -- hence not just indefensible but unsustainable -- bundle of obsolete costs and obscene profit margins in an era when technology has made them completely unnecessary (and increasingly obviously so).

In short, global flips are the boardroom fantasy of unreflective central "planners" (like Berlin 12) meaning to do something good, but utterly out of touch with both reality and rigorous reasoning and scarcely able to think more than one or two steps ahead.

Ditto for the sustainability of local flips, like UC's.

Harnad, S (2014) The only way to make inflated journal subscriptions unsustainable: Mandate Green Open Access. *LSE Impact of Social Sciences Blog* 4/28

December 26, 2015 3:28 pm

Rick Anderson (editor) said...

So, if anyone who is associated with EOS is interested in engaging in an intellectually serious way with my questions (which themselves are serious and were intended respectfully), I'd still be interested in answers to them. Stevan's weirdly hysterical and sarcastic response does nothing to shed any light on this topic.

I'll say this again: I intend no criticism of EOS by posing these questions. There's no particular reason why it should have to be a "public organization" that accepts all comers as members and that does its work in a transparent manner. Many good and reputable organizations don't. But if it isn't and doesn't, that does seem to raise interesting questions about its dedication to openness and transparency.

December 26, 2015 10:23 pm

Richard Poynder said...

This is posted on behalf of Bernard Rentier, Chairman, Enabling Open Scholarship
1/2

The EOS story is actually much simpler and it lacks all the spicy stuff of conspiracy theories that some would like to see in it. I am sorry to disappoint them now with a very dull explanation...

EOS was created originally by Alma Swan and myself after a small meeting held by us in Liège in October 2007. It was a time when, as rector of the University of Liège, I had recently passed a new regulation at the University Board mandating green open access with a strong enforcement based on a link to assessment procedures. Our primary objective was to encourage university leaders to adopt the same policy. Indeed, we thought that propagating green OA needed strong personal involvement by academic authorities, and not only that of librarians who were already widely convinced themselves but generally less able to convince researchers.

We thought the name of the Association was explicit enough, and its contraction, EOS, meaning "Dawn" in Greek, was symbolic of the rise of a new era.

We asked a few people we knew in various countries (their names are listed on the website's "People" section) and who could contribute to expand our goals (clearly defined on the website) to join us for a start.

Due to administrative slowness, it took some time to establish the Association, a legal entity under Belgian law (no international plot, not even to set up a Brussels lobby..., but just because I'm a Belgian citizen, sorry about this lack of gloom!).

Our aim was clearly to create a web support to disseminate information about OA to universities and research centers and to provide them with technical and legal advice as well as with experienced counseling.

December 27, 2015 8:21 am

Richard Poynder said...

This is posted on behalf of Bernard Rentier, Chairman, Enabling Open Scholarship
2/2

To make a long story short:

The only universities/research centers who actually joined EOS were the Queensland University of Technology and the University of Liège, where Tom Cochrane and myself were holding leading positions.

The only personal members who ever joined were those listed in the "People" section on the website, i.e. the Founders.

These two facts have nothing to do with restrictions or selectivity on our part, they were just failures to recruit, I must admit. The lack of recruitment made it difficult to generate enough money to hire someone even part-time. So everything (i.e. the site and the answers to questions) rested mostly on Alma's benevolence and I take this unfortunate opportunity to congratulate her and thank her warmly for her valuable efforts. Thanks Alma! Some people may be disappointed you are no Mata Hari...

This lasted until 2013, as shown clearly by the last updating of the website. Indeed, in the meantime, EOS has been instrumental, as a partner, in developing and obtaining an investigation program financed by the European Union and called PASTEUR4OA.

The management of this project needed so much involvement and dedication by Alma that she could no longer conduct both activities in parallel. I envisioned for a while to take over but soon realised that my duties as a rector and my uneasiness in English made it almost impossible. It was definitely too time-consuming. Moreover, the rise and success of other OA-promoting websites and discussion forums made it less essential to keep spending more time on the EOS one. Perhaps our mistake was to keep it open...! None of us though that our negligence would someday be mistaken as obscure malevolence...

If EOS has been useful once, it is when it helped setting up the PASTEUR4OA project. The latter will end in July 2016 and will provide the research community and political powers with very complete information on the various national OA policies, leading hopefully to a homogenisation throughout Europe and possibly elsewhere in the World.

After completion of this programme, the future of EOS will be re-examined.

So much for that. I am terribly sorry that this does not sound like a novel by John LeCarré but constitutes a very simple and unexciting story, revealing nothing but candid characters and a lot of good will. Not even the plot for a B-series spy movie...

Happy New Year to all!

Bernard Rentier
Chairman, Enabling Open Scholarship

December 27, 2015 8:23 am

Richard Poynder said...

I would like to thank Bernard Rentier for his detailed and frank account of EOS.

That said, it does seem odd to me that it took Rick Anderson two attempts to get this response from EOS.

It is also not clear to me that anyone at EOS has responded directly to the implicit question at the heart of Rick's two posts: do members of EOS believe that a commitment to OA implies a commitment to openness and transparency in the management and activities of those organisations espousing OA? (Unless, of course, we are to take at face value Stevan's sarcastic response, including his comment that "[W]e are in fact not committed to transparency and public openness - or, for that matter, to openness of any kind").

I was also struck at all the talk of John le Carré novels, conspiracy theories, Mata Hari, and secret societies. It is true that in my post (which did not mention EOS), I said I felt there was a danger that the OA movement could turn into some kind of secret society. But I did not mention EOS. Moreover, Rick's questions seemed to me to be (as he put it), "serious" and "intended respectfully".

Yet the responses from EOS (especially Stevan's response) seem to imply that in asking his questions Rick was evincing some kind of paranoia. I am not sure why. In fact, one might argue that the overly defensive responses to Rick's questions themselves flirt with paranoia. Certainly they confirm me in my belief that there is a strand within the OA movement that tends towards non-transparency and non-inclusiveness.

December 27, 2015 5:19 pm

Rick Anderson (editor) said...

I'd like to echo Richard's thanks to Bernard for his informative reply.

However, I'd also like to echo Richard's puzzlement as to the repeated invocations of "conspiracy theory," "malevolence," "play-acting," etc. None of those terms appear (either explicitly or implicitly) in the questions I posed. Speaking for myself, the only reason it even occurred to me to ask those questions was that Stevan had quite explicitly cited the EOS as an example of a "public organization" that "displays all its documents publicly" and that "any institution can join." If Stevan hadn't made such strong declarations about the organization's openness and transparency, and if the public information currently made available hadn't so utterly failed to bear out those declarations, the questions would never have come up. And if Stevan had simply responded "The EOS is more or less moribund these days, and that's why there's so little information about its current activities and membership," that would have been a wholly satisfactory explanation -- to me, anyway.

December 28, 2015 7:17 am

Richard Poynder said...

This is posted on behalf of Bernard Rentier, Chairman, Enabling Open Scholarship

Dear Richard and Rick,

I am sorry if my answers keep being so simple and basic, but if it took two attempts to get my response, it is only because it took me some time to react. Blame it on the Holiday season and a few other chores.

Except for Stevan, nobody moved, I suppose, because they expected the chairman to do it.

Stevan's response was humorous because when you see things from inside, any hare-brained idea about secrecy ("secret societies"), any suspicion of intentional lack of transparency, etc. are laughable but also out of proportion with reality.

I know that Richard's original post did not mention EOS. But Peter Murray-Rust's did: "Look at 'Enabling Open Scholarship' (EOS) where the great and good set up a secret organisation to manage OA. It includes many of the professors, etc. of OA [sic] and shuts out people like me and you. This was 7-8 years ago and suggests that the OA movement was a privileged clique that dictated what others should do".

We felt this was very aggressive and unfair. It should be easy to understand why terms like paranoia were used.

Personally, I don't feel paranoid (I know all paranoids don't either!). I have no difficulty to explain quite frankly what happened and why, but I cannot help being upset by such "mauvaise foi". This may explain a few

sarcastic lines in what I try to keep proper, serious and comprehensive.

One may perfectly translate my previous response into "EOS is moribund". Personally I can live with that. I was just trying to be complete. And for me, PASTEUR4OA is a brilliant success which justifies EOS all by itself.

However, all this raises an interesting question: how much transparency is needed to avoid appearing as non-transparent and non-inclusive when you are an OA-minded association? As far as transparency is concerned, in all public organisations I have either chaired or participated in, Board meeting minutes are confidential and I have never felt it was basically wrong. Should EOS publish those? Or excerpts? Or a list of decisions taken? Should the General Assembly minutes be published on-line? What kind of transparency should we set up and to what extent?

And concerning inclusiveness, what can we do better than what we have on the "membership" section of the website? (http://www.openscholarship.org/jcms/c_5414/en/membership). It is widely open. Is it so shocking that we keep a right of approval through a steering committee? Should we accept just anybody without scrutiny? Is there an association on Earth which does that?

Finally, and hopefully to close this subject, I can state here that all EOS members have always been focused on the development of OA in universities and research centers and never on who should or should not be a member (obviously too little about who should). Our obsession was to provide accurate and valid information so that the publication landscape would evolve the way - not just us but - all defenders of OA wanted. This is certainly why we have been so amazed by PMR's outburst.

Best regards,
Bernard Rentier

December 28, 2015 9:19 am

Stevan Harnad said...

Yule-Foolery

Despite the season, I take a less jolly view of this exchange than Bernard does.

Though the suspicions about EOS were silly from the get-go -- they didn't even have the elementary support of a putative *motive* that even amateur detective novels know they need in order to generate suspicion -- they seem now to have sunk into abject absurdity. Humour is clearly unavailing to restore common sense, so let me provide a motive (in fact three) -- not for the suspected lack-of-transparency on the part of the suspects, but for the suspiciousness on the part of the sleuths:

(1) For PMR the motive is an inordinate fondness for open data, even if it is at odds with OA -- a motive EOS clearly does not share.

(2) For RA the motive is unfondness of OA itself, which EOS again clearly cannot share (I won't venture an ulterior motive for RA's unfondness).

(3) For RP the motive is seasonal shortage of substance.

So let me propose three topics of substance, either of which would make a jolly basis for seasonal discussion in "Open and Shut":

I. Can anyone provide a substantive link between the need for open access to published, peer-reviewed research and the need for peer review reform?

II. Can anyone provide a substantive link between the need for open access to published, peer-reviewed research and the need for academic freedom?

III. Can anyone provide a substantive link between the need for open access to published, peer-reviewed research and the need for freedom of information?

(And can anyone still remember what the words "access to research"

meant before they somehow got conflated with re-use rights or with "transparency"?)

I've been on this ride a long time now but I can't help noting that as we get exercised over all these other worthy matters, we are still rather far from having open access to published, peer-reviewed research...

December 28, 2015 2:21 pm

Rick Anderson (editor) said...

Ins response to this from Bernard:

However, all this raises an interesting question: how much transparency is needed to avoid appearing as non-transparent and non-inclusive when you are an OA-minded association?

Speaking for myself only (not for Peter or Richard), I'll simply reiterate what I've now said multiple times: no transparency is needed at all. No OA-minded association is under any obligation to share its documents publicly, to allow all comers to join, etc. My questions were prompted by the twin facts that a) Stevan said these were things EOS does, and b) I couldn't see any evidence that EOS does them. Bernard's explanation as to why it doesn't seems perfectly reasonable to me. Stevan's assertion that it does is the only thing that strikes me as strange.

In response to this from Stevan:

For RA the motive is unfondness of OA itself, which EOS again clearly cannot share (I won't venture an ulterior motive for RA's unfondness).

Stevan, you've been suggesting that I oppose OA and that I have ulterior motives for doing so for years now. Are you retiring?

In any case, the reality is that I'm very much in favor of OA, and always have been. I think you'd be hard-pressed to find any statement from me that opposes it -- though I do often insist on discussing its costs as well as its benefits (and in speaking critically of the excesses of some of its more evangelical, not to say fundamentalist, advocates). Unfortunately, too often it seems that discussing OA in anything other than an evangelical/fundamentilist mode is taken to signify opposition. This is one major reason why genuine discussion so often devolves into hysterical overreaction and/or juvenile name-calling. And it's really too bad, because OA is an important topic that would benefit from more genuine analysis and less sloganeering.

December 28, 2015 4:05 pm

Stevan Harnad said...

@RickAnderson(editor): Not retiring, just tiring of reiterating... http://j.mp/RAonOAon

December 28, 2015 5:31 pm

Peter Murray-Rust said...

I care about the use of the word "Open" (I am on the committee of the Open Access Definition (OKD) of of The Open Knowledge (Foundation) http://opendefinition.org).

I am an adherent to the philosophy of BOAI - which is itself consistent with the basis of Free/Open Culture movements and specifically OKD . BOAI states

"completely free and unrestricted access to [the scholarly literature] by all scientists, scholars, teachers, students, and other curious minds. Removing access barriers to this literature will accelerate research, enrich education, share the learning of the rich with the poor and the poor with the rich, make this literature as useful as it can be, and lay the foundation for uniting humanity in a common intellectual conversation and quest for knowledge."

and

" permitting any users to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of these articles, crawl them for indexing, pass them as data to software, or use them for any other lawful purpose, without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable

from gaining access to the internet itself."

This is consistent with OKD and also CC-BY (or CC0).

In the 2-3 years following the BOAI declaration it was effectively emasculated by redefining "Open Access" to mean whatever the group of opinion makers defined at the time. This was done in a non-inclusive manner, decisions were made offline, and dissent on the GOAL mailing list was rejected without discussion - and I have even had my personal integrity attacked. I am among many who found any attempts at constructive discussion drowned by statements of dogma. As a result "Open" is an operationally meaningless word in "Open Access"

A new movement looks to its leaders to widen discussion in a constructive manner - at the time (2007) I believed that an organisation entitled "Enabling Open Scholarship" would support and encourage "Openness" - in the sense of Free/Open Culture. It turned out that individual membership was selective and costly and I could get no indication of what the organisation did or intended. My complaints are the misleading name, rather than the practice - and the lack of any inclusive body at that time (or later) which publicly represents the continuation of BOAI and encourages widespread participation.

As a result there is no public agreement on what Open Access means in practice. The practice of "OA" is moving towards closed administrative processes run by universities and funders rather than an inclusive involvement of scholars at all levels, *and citizens*. We are told how to practice OA rather than being involved in designing the philosophy and practice.

Note: I contrast this with the SPARC/OpenCon activities which have been remarkable. Early Career Researchers bring great vision and energy but are disillusioned with the current bureaucratic approach to OA in which they are largely trapped.

December 28, 2015 7:49 pm

Unknown said...

Peter (M-R), all -
First let me state that I am a founder member of EOS.
Second let me state that Bernard has - as always - stated the EOS position clearly and openly.
Third let me admit that although not a frequent contributor I do checkout the RP O&S Blog from time to time, and have contributed one interview http://poynder.blogspot.no/2012/07/oa-interviews-keith-jeffery-uk-science.html which I believe explains my position on OA.
Fourth let me state that I have always been pro-green and anti-gold for the reasons Stevan repeats so eloquently.
I argued strongly within RCUK (I was then employed by STFC) against the OA policy that emerged first, and even more strongly against the second (more strongly gold and anti-green)but other research councils' representaives prevailed.
Fifth While agreeing with Stevan that we must concentrate on getting all the research publication output (including - my addition - grey literature) available toll-free I am also concerned about toll-free green OA for datasets and software, and their relationship to scholarly publications (and researcher workflows) and indeed I work within the framework of RDA (Research Data Alliance) towards this end.

We all know why the BOAI principles have been progressively de-railed. One explanation given to me at an appropriate political level was that the tax-take from commercial publishers was greater than the cost of research libraries. Suggesting that groups working for BOAI-style OA are secretive does not help. We need to address the 'common enemy'with reasoned arguments backed up by evidence - a somewhat lonely furrow ploughed by Stevan, Alma, Bernard and others over many years.
The failing (if any) of EOS was to concentrate on the PASTEUR4OA project and not increasing membership. As a participant (through euroCRIS, not EOS) in PASTEUR4OA I can only echo Bernard's remarks. I believe PASTEUR4OA is providing (openly) a rich store of material for the OA movement as a whole. I do not believe the choice

made by EOS was a failing.
Keith

December 30, 2015 11:05 am

Graham said...

"I argued strongly within RCUK (I was then employed by STFC) against the OA policy that emerged first, and even more strongly against the second (more strongly gold and anti-green)"

This is the problem. Green and Gold OA are essentially complimentary, and largely need to be targetted to different audiences - Green needs to win over the researchers, and the people that can influence researcher behaviour but don't have money; Gold needs to talk to the people that have the money and get them to allocate funds to make it happen.

And it's fine to have different priorities - you may prefer Green or Gold, be more interested in getting more material available to read, you might need to have freedom to mine and remix; in which case, make the arguments in favour of your preference to the appropriate audience.

Arguing against a particular form of OA is simply holding back progress towards *any* form of OA.

People are fighting this as if we have to get it "right", and if we don't then we lose any opportunity to have the other components / outcomes that we care about. It's not. This is a journey, and the evolution of research communication doesn't end when we hit 100% green or 100% gold.

Our biggest issue should not be what is "right", but how slowly progress is being made.

December 30, 2015 12:32 pm

Mike Taylor said...

"Arguing against a particular form of OA is simply holding back progress towards *any* form of OA."

YES! This! Thank you, Graham.

December 30, 2015 11:32 pm

Richard Poynder said...

1/3

To reiterate: I did not mention EOS in my post, and I harbour no suspicions about the organisation. Moreover, since it is now apparently moribund I take no particular interest in it. That said, the defensive response to Rick's questions about EOS underlines for me the fact that OA advocates are not by nature inclined to be open in their processes.

Nor are they instinctively democratic. One need only monitor the Global Open Access List for a few weeks to see the hauteur with which OA "old sweats" pronounce on the topic, and castigate anyone who dares express a contrary view.

I also assume Stevan's question ("Can anyone provide a substantive link between the need for open access to published, peer-reviewed research and the need for freedom of information?") implies he sees no need for transparency in OA advocacy. Anyway, let this comment be a slightly oblique response to that question.

It is worth noting that OA advocates have used FOI requests extensively in their war with legacy publishers over OA, and FOI is a mechanism that Stevan Harnad has himself encouraged and applauded the use of. He has in the past also demanded openness and transparency in the way funds are divvied out between green and gold OA initiatives. Of course publishers are more secretive, but when OA advocates say there is no connection between OA and FOI one is tempted to say: What's good for the goose is good for the gander.

Be that as it may, contrary to Rick Anderson, I think the OA movement should have been more open and transparent in its processes, and certainly more inclusive. Let me explain.

As readers of this blog will know, the OA movement was born in 2002, when the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI) was launched.

BOAI was funded and organised by George Soros' Open Society Institute (as it was then known). As such, the delegates were chosen by OSI (with guidance presumably from some unknown people deemed to have an understanding of the problems and issues associated with access to research). Like Berlin 12, BOAI was an invitation-only meeting. But at that point holding a closed meeting was not only sensible, but presumably unavoidable. After all, there was no such thing as an OA movement until BOAI.

But what BOAI delegates failed to do was to create an OA organisation and institute a democratic structure to guide and inform the activities of the OA movement, and to give it some authority. Since BOAI delegates presumably wanted to get buy-in from the entire research community would that not have been the logical thing to do? In any case, they were proposing changes that would have significant implications for researchers everywhere. In my view, therefore, this was a serious omission. As Peter Murray-Rust points out above, the OA movement has always lacked "any inclusive body" that "publicly represents the continuation of BOAI and encourages widespread participation."

Essentially, BOAI was a meeting between a small group of like-minded people, and organised by a philanthropist with a specific political agenda. In the wake of that meeting OSI committed several million dollars to fund a number of OA initiatives (and has continued to play a key role in the OA movement since then). As such, those who attended BOAI took the Soros money but did nothing to make the movement "official" or inclusive, or seek to engage the research community in their plans, beyond exhorting them to embrace OA (an exhortation that most researchers understandably ignored, or actively resisted).

Aside from a lack of inclusiveness, this approach has had two important consequences. First, with no formal organisation in place, it has been open to anyone to claim that they represent the "OA movement" (even publishers). Second, we have ended up with no single authoritative definition of OA. These two "vacuums" have been a constant drag on the development of open access and, I believe, made it vulnerable to appropriation by others for their own ends.

January 04, 2016 10:50 am

Richard Poynder said...

2/3

In 2012 the subsequent BOAI 10 meeting provided an opportunity to put things right. In the event, once again there appears to have been no attempt to create a democratic organisation to represent the OA movement, or to include the wider research community. The delegates reaffirmed the BOAI definition, but they did not have the authority to address the fact that a number of other definitions of OA were now coexisting with BOAI (including the one defined in the 2003 Berlin Declaration), or to prevent publishers from, for instance, presenting hybrid OA as an acceptable form of open access.

Once again, BOAI 10 was an invitation-only meeting. While it made sense for the original BOAI meeting to be closed, it is not clear to me why the 2012 meeting was. This is important not least because the number of delegates had nearly doubled, from 16 to 29. Moreover, it was not simply a case of adding a further 13 delegates. Some of the original participants were actively excluded from the meeting.

As one of those excluded said to me at the time: "For some reason I have become *'persona non grata'* and was not invited to the meeting taking place in Budapest".

The question arises: since there was no democratic structure in place, and no official authority system in the OA movement, how was it decided who was persona non grata and who was not? Clearly someone made these decisions, but I am not aware who did, or that the selection process was ever made public.

As such, one might feel that the BOAI 10 selection process was a good candidate for an FOI request. However, since the meeting was organised by a private organisation (by now known as the Open Society Foundations) an FOI request was not possible.

One might therefore want to suggest that the long list of

recommendations produced at BOAI 10 was an attempt by a group of self-appointed legislators to frame new laws for their peers. For this reason, BOAI 10 was not just another scholarly meeting.

After all, quite apart from the wider research community, how could these people claim to represent the OA movement? The upshot, as Peter Murray-Rust points out, is that researchers have ended up being "told how to practice OA rather than being involved in designing the philosophy and practice."

This point becomes all the more poignant if we recall that when it became apparent to BOAI delegates that most researchers had no intention of heeding their exhortations they lobbied governments, funders and institutions to demand that their colleagues be compelled to embrace OA (by means of ever more draconian OA mandates). For a number of reasons (not all related to open access) governments and funders have gradually done just that.

Meanwhile (as noted) the absence of an official OA organisation has allowed others to appropriate OA for their own purposes — most notably publishers, who have introduced expensive pay-to-publish gold OA priced at a level intended to protect their excessive profits. At the same time, they have sought to emasculate green OA by introducing ever more complex and limiting self-archiving rules and embargoes.

It is against this background that we need to see Berlin 12, and its decision to hold an invitation-only meeting.

Berlin 12, we should note, was organised by a research funder (the Max Planck Society). But why was it an invitation-only meeting? Presumably because MPG wanted to focus exclusively on gold OA and did not want the distraction of a having a bunch of articulate green OA advocates shouting the odds during the meeting and insisting (as they did successfully at the BOAI meetings) that green OA should not only be included in any OA discussion, but prioritised in any OA strategy. As Harnad puts it above, the invitation-only decision was doubtless because the aim was "to forge a common front for working out a gold-OA 'flip' deal with publishers."

January 04, 2016 10:51 am

Richard Poynder said...

3/3

In other words — in the same way that some OA advocates were excluded from BOAI 10 — OA "old sweats" with a predilection for green OA would appear to have been excluded from Berlin 12.

And Berlin 12 would seem to foreshadow the future. With little progress having been made in the 14 years since BOAI, funders, governments and university managers have had to conclude that if an adequate level of OA is to be achieved some time this century they will need to take some executive decisions themselves. This is what the UK government did in 2012, and it is what the Dutch Minister Sander Dekker decided was necessary in 2014.

From one perspective, of course, this would seem to be a natural development. The OA movement made its case, it has persuaded the powers-that-be that a move to OA is called for, and the powers-that-be have decided to pick up the ball and run with it. But with no official OA organisation, and OA advocates still constantly bickering, governments and funders doubtless feel they have no choice but to turn to publishers for solutions, and these will inevitably be gold OA solutions.

And university mangers are moving in the same direction. We can see this, for instance, with the OA Big Deal contracts that Dutch universities are currently negotiating with publishers like Springer and Elsevier. Importantly, these negotiations are taking place behind closed doors, and the contracts that are emerging are replete with NDA clauses.

Again this might seem to be a natural development. It will ensure the world gets OA — which is, after all, what OA advocates wanted. The problem is that it will entrench the so-called publishing oligarchy in the system, and so allow the very companies that OA advocates have for so long railed against maintain their control of scholarly communication.

At the same time, it will mean that the affordability problem (formerly

known as the serials crisis) that has long had the research community in its grip, is unlikely to be solved. This is ironic given that it was precisely in order to reduce the excessive costs that publishers charge for their services that led many to join the OA movement in the first place.

Doubtless open OA meetings will continue to be held. But it seems likely that in future the significant decisions will take place behind closed doors. To quote Peter Murray-Rust again: “The practice of ‘OA’ is moving towards closed administrative processes run by universities and funders rather than an inclusive involvement of scholars at all levels, *and citizens*”.

One is tempted to suggest that this would be just deserts for those OA advocates who have shied away from inclusiveness and transparency. While they have *preached* openness, and denounced publishers for their secrecy, they have not always led by example with respect to their own activities. Even “legacy” publishing consultant Joe Esposito has called for greater openness in the OA movement. As he put it in 2013, “Let’s be open about open access”.

With no official OA organisation in place, those OA advocates who disagree with the way in which research funders and university managers are now seeking to work with legacy publishers to flip their journals to OA (in a way that will inevitably suit publishers more than researchers) may see themselves increasingly side-lined and ignored, as will be green OA.

The upshot: while OA is surely inevitable, unless something changes the affordability and transparency problems associated with scholarly communication seem unlikely to be resolved in the OA environment (in Europe at least). And the companies that OA advocates were so determined to bring to heel will continue to call the shots, and set the prices.

To cap it all, many OA advocates may find themselves with their noses pressed to the window of the meeting rooms where decisions are made, uninvited and excluded.

January 04, 2016 10:54 am

Stevan Harnad said...

No Sweat

Richard Poynder and I are apparently both OA "Old Sweats": Richard has been banging on about OA's needing an open umbrella organization at least as long as I've been banging on about OA's needing Green OA mandates.

Now Richard is blaming OA's slow progress on his recommendation not having been heeded; I do much the same.

So what is the difference between us?

I just keep banging on about the need for Green OA mandates, but Richard is now beginning to suspect that some secret conspiracy (because of the failure to create an OA open umbrella organization) is going on.

Richard is no doubt right that publishers are up to something, and it has to do with Gold OA and prospective deals with institutions and funders. The dealing is not open, but the fact that it's going on is no secret.

But it's trying to squeeze journalistic fodder out of a stone to seek anything of substance with these breath-takingly silly suspicions about BOAI and EOS.

Lampoon my own efforts all you like, Richard, but the one whose credibility is being retroactively eroded is yourself, if you don't resist taking the tabloid track in lean years.

And please de-conflate OA (open access to published research) from (FOI) freedom of information. Research is already "free information." It's the access that's not free. FOI covers a lot more sinister territory, but it has nothing whatsoever to do with OA.

It wouldn't hurt to de-conflate OA from yet another sexy topic "academic freedom": No, neither mandating nor providing OA is an assault on or

threat to academic freedom, quite the opposite.

If you do decide to branch off into FOI and academic freedom, Richard, that will be splendid. There's much to do and learn there. -- But then forget about OA. There's no interesting connection whatsoever.

January 04, 2016 4:24 pm

Richard Poynder said...

As usual, I am happy for you to have the last word Stevan.

January 04, 2016 4:37 pm

Stevan Harnad said...

"As usual, I am happy for you to have the last word Stevan."

Haven't you already said that earlier in this thread, Richard? ;>)

January 04, 2016 4:59 pm

Richard Poynder said...

I am not sure why you say that Stevan, but quite honestly it is hard to continue a discussion with someone who either does not read what you have said, or simply misrepresents it.

One small example: I have repeatedly said that I harbour no suspicions about EOS. You repeatedly assert that I do.

You likewise keep assigning a variety of different motivations to me that are not true (and how would you know what my motivations are anyway?)

Enough already.

January 05, 2016 7:40 am

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